

Testimony of Alexia Cousins
Before the Human Services Committee
February 14th, 2023

In Support of HB 6616, An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status

Good morning members of the human services committee and happy Valentine's Day, to those who celebrate. My name is Alexia Cousins, I am a Hartford resident, a Jamaican immigrant, a social worker, and a community organizer at Planned Parenthood Votes! CT. I am here to testify in support of HB 6616, An act concerning expansion of HUSKY health benefits to those ineligible due to immigration status.

I was born in Jamaica, moved to this country when I was 6 years old and received my citizenship when I was 20. I have family members who are undocumented and therefore do not have access to adequate healthcare because of their immigration status. I remember being a college student, and having to avoid receiving health services because I feared what the bill would look like. Healthcare is treated as a privilege instead of a right and if you've never been in a position of having to avoid receiving healthcare because of your immigration status, or your income, or any other factors consider yourself privileged. I do, however, want us to change the narrative of only having access to healthcare under the "right" circumstances and instead advocate that everyone needs access to healthcare because we want to ensure the well-being of every human. Access to health care should not be a luxury that is only available to a select few but rather available to everyone because we all have health needs that need to be met. The pandemic has exacerbated health concerns. We have a responsibility to keep our state as healthy as possible by providing people with the opportunity to seek medical care through this expansion of HUSKY health benefits.

Investing in the health of immigrant communities is an investment in the future of Connecticut and will reduce healthcare costs in the long run because people will be able to visit a health care provider for preventative care services rather than being seen by a provider as a last resort. This bill could save lives and money.

While it is great that we have expanded healthcare access to undocumented children up to 12 and for pregnant people, we cannot stop there. We are essentially separating children from their parents by leaving parents out of the conversation when asking for healthcare access. If we want to promote the well-being of children, there are several factors that play into this such as access to food and housing to name a few. If families are struggling with medical debt, they will have a limited capacity to provide children with basic needs such as food and housing. We shouldn't make it more difficult for families to raise their children, passing this bill could unload that burden from several immigrant families.

People everywhere should have the opportunity to live to be the healthiest versions of themselves.

In conclusion, I support HB6616, and I ask the committee to pass and support this legislation. In the future I ask that the committee be open to increasing access to all undocumented immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Alexia Cousins